

September 2, 2012 by Steve Brandon



Jesus Is Pro-Family

Mark 10:1-16

1. Jesus is Pro-Marriage (verses 1-12).
2. Jesus is Pro-Children (verses 13-16).

Chick-fil-A is a fast food restaurant chain, headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia. "The corporate culture is heavily influenced by its founder's Christian beliefs." Their official purpose statement says that the business exists, "To glorify God by being a faithful steward of all that is entrusted to us. To have a positive influence on all who come in contact with Chick-fil-A." As a result, Chick-fil-A is closed for business on Sunday. The restaurant is also closed on Thanksgiving and on Christmas. Truett Cathy, who founded the company, said, "Our decision to close on Sunday was our way of honoring God and of directing our attention to things that mattered more than our business." And God has prospered Chick-fil-A. "In 2010 Chick-fil-A took the industry lead in average sales per restaurant, making an average of \$2.7 million per restaurant in 2010 (McDonald's was second with \$2.4 million per restaurant)." Chick-fil-A beat McDonald's even with all of Chick-fil-A's stores being closed every Sunday! [\[1\]](#)

In recent months, Chick-fil-A has been in the news, as they have been embroiled in a controversy. On June 16, 2012, President and COO of Chick-fil-A, Dan Cathy was on the Ken Coleman Show, a weekly podcast. The whole podcast was centered around Father's Day. Dan Cathy was invited to talk about fatherhood. Regarding the issue of fatherlessness in our society today, Dan Cathy said, "I think we are inviting God's judgment on our nation when we shake our fist at him and say you know, 'We know better than you as to what constitutes a marriage.'" [\[2\]](#)

During a separate interview with the "Baptist Press," Dan Cathy said that his company is "... very much supportive of the family -- the biblical definition of the family unit. We are a family-owned business, a family-led business. ... We operate as a family business ... our restaurants are typically led by families; some are single. We want to do anything we possibly can to strengthen families. We are very much committed to that." [\[3\]](#)

As a result of these comments, Chick-Fil-A has faced some heavy criticism. Restaurants have been picketed. People have pledged never to eat Chick-Fil-A ever again. Business deals have been dropped (i.e. The Hensen company pulled its Pajanimals kids' meal toy in protest). Politicians have entered the fray. In Chicago, there is on Chick-Fil-A restaurant, with plans to build another store. However, one city alderman, Joe Moreno, has pledged to fight their plans, so that another store doesn't come to Chicago. ... So much for tolerance. [\[4\]](#)

Calls have come for people to boycott their restaurants. Others have spoken out in support of the company, encouraging people to patronize their restaurants (i.e. Mick Huckabee and Rick Santorum) [\[5\]](#) In a twisted sort of way, they have been categorized with Westboro Baptist Church (who routinely will protest at a fallen soldier's funeral, claiming that homosexuals are destroying the nation), even though Chick-fil-A will gladly serve those who are in opposition to their world-views. [\[6\]](#)

This is only one illustration of the culture wars that we face in our day and age. We are in a culture war over the family. We are in a culture war in seeking to understand and define marriage. We are in a culture war in seeking to understand the worth of a child.

This conflict isn't new to our day at all. Jesus faced a culture war in his day as well. There were those who were seeking to downgrade the sanctity of marriage. There were those who failed to embrace the worth of a child. When facing such things, Jesus was decidedly pro-family. He was pro-marriage. He was pro-children.

If you haven't done so already, I invite you to open your Bible to Mark, chapter 10. Our text this morning will cover the first 16 verses of this chapter. Let's read the text.

Mark 10:1-16

Getting up, He went from there to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan; crowds gathered around Him again, and, according to His custom, He once more began to teach them. Some Pharisees came up to Jesus, testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife. And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away." But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and the two shall become one flesh; so they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

In the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again. And He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery."

And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God

belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all." And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands on them.

We see Jesus confronted with two issues: marriage and children. And, in each instance, Jesus comes out on the side of the family. He puts forth a strong case for the permanence of marriage, against those who would want a quick and easy divorce. He rebukes those who would seek to relegate the children to second-class citizens.

Let's look at my first point, ...

1. Jesus is Pro-Marriage (verses 1-12).

This is the main point of verses 1-12.

Mark 10:1

Getting up, He went from there to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan."

At this point, we see a change in geography. In chapter 9, verse 33, Jesus and His disciples were in Capernaum. But, now, Jesus and His disciples have moved south, through the region of Judea to the land beyond the Jordan (10:1) -- that is, east of the Jordan. Jesus would never return north again. His ministry in Capernaum and Galilee was finished.

At the beginning of chapter 11, we will find Jesus entering Jerusalem for the passion week, when He will die. But, in chapter 10, Jesus is in Perea, which is the name that is given to the land "beyond the Jordan." The Greek word for "beyond" is pronounced, "peran", thus, the name Perea. Many have, then, identified the ministry of Jesus in Mark 10 as "The Perea Ministry."

And in Perea, Jesus did what He always did; He taught them. Verse 1 says that, "... Crowds gathered around Him again, and, according to His custom, He once more began to teach them." This was the primary ministry of Jesus. He was a preacher. He was a teacher. And the crowds loved to hear Him.

In verse 2, we see some from the crowd asking him a question.

Mark 10:2

Some Pharisees came up to Jesus, testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife.

This is a marriage question. This is a divorce question. "Is it lawful to divorce?"

During the days of Jesus, this was a debate. There were two schools of thought. One school followed Rabbi Shammai. He was the conservative. He claimed that there was only one reason for divorce: when the wife was guilty of adultery. Another school followed Rabbi Hillel. He was more liberal. He taught that a husband was allowed to divorce his wife for practically any reason at all. We'll come back to this.

Now, these Pharisees may have come to Jesus, seeking clarification on this issue. Who's right? Shammai or Hillel? But, I highly doubt it. I think that there is another reason why the Pharisees came asking about the issue of divorce. They were far from genuine about their question. It all has to do with geography.

It's no accident that they came and asked Jesus this question here, in Perea. Do you remember what happened in Perea? John the Baptist lost his head in Perea. Do you remember why he lost his head? Herod held a feast. His wife's daughter came and danced for the crowd. Herod and the crowd was pleased with her dancing. When she finished, Herod said to her, "Ask me for whatever you want and I will give it to you. ... up to half of my kingdom" (Mark 6:22-23). She said, "[I want] the head of John the Baptist" (Mark 6:24). Herod wasn't particularly thrilled with this turn of events. But, "because of his oaths and because of his dinner guests, he was unwilling to refuse her" (Mark 6:26). So, "the king sent an executioner and commanded him to bring back [the] head [of John the Baptist]" (Mark 6:27).

Why did this young girl ask make such a request? Her mother told her to ask for John's head (Mark 6:24). Why would Herodias want John beheaded? Because she had a grudge against him (Mark 6:19).

Why did she have this grudge? Because of John's preaching (Mark 6:18). What was John preaching? "It is not lawful for you to have [Herodias as your] wife" (Mark 6:18). And why was that? Herodias was the wife of Herod's brother Philip. And yet, something happened between Herod and Herodias. There was an attraction between them. Perhaps immorality was involved. We don't know the details. But, we do know that Herodias divorced Philip, so that she could marry Herod.

Rather than sweeping it all under the table, John wouldn't let it go. He continued to preach against this marital union, saying that it was not lawful. Mark 6:18 tells us that John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." Herod threw him and prison. And John continued to say, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife" (Mark 6:18).

Perhaps Herod's skin was thick enough that John's opinion didn't really bother him too much. Perhaps Herod was even contemplating repenting. We know that Herod respected John as "a righteous and holy man" and that "he used to enjoy listening to him" (Mark 6:20). Certainly, Herod was "very perplexed" as to what he ought to do (Mark 6:20).

But, Herodias didn't like John at all. She was very threatened by John and his continual haranguing about their unlawful marriage. She knew that "the only place where her marriage certificate could safely be written was on the back of the death warrant of John" [\[7\]](#) And so,

eventually, she got her way -- the head of John the Baptist on a platter (Mark 6:28). She had gotten rid of a political enemy. And, her marriage was safe.

Do you see now why I don't think that the Pharisees were genuine in their asking about divorce? I believe that the Pharisees wanted Herodias to have the head of Jesus on a platter as well. You can see this in the text. Look again at verse 2, ...

Mark 10:2

Some Pharisees came up to Jesus, *testing* Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife.

This was a test. It's not that Jesus never said anything about marriage and divorce before. We have His comments recorded in the Sermon on the Mount. His views were exactly the same as John's views, and the Pharisees knew it. But, the test was this: Jesus may say something that would get back to Herodias. Perhaps Jesus would be thrown into the same prison in Perea that John had known so well. And their dream of Jesus' head on a platter might just become a reality.

Jesus answers with typical tact and wisdom.

Mark 10:3

And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?"

I love the heart of Jesus here. He doesn't just spout forth His own opinion on the subject. He goes back to the Bible. "What did Moses say?" Whenever we face difficult or questionable issues, we need to ask the same thing: "What did Moses say?" "What did Jesus say?" "What did Paul say?" "What did God say?" Let's be people of the book. And when we figure out what God says on a matter, let us walk in obedience out of love to Him.

We see their response in verse 4, ...

Mark 10:4

They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."

They quote from Deuteronomy 24. This is the main passage over which the Rabbis focused their discussion about divorce. The passage itself deals with a very particular case.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4

"When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's wife, and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance.

Technically, this passage deals with the situation in which a man divorces a wife and marries another. Once he does that, he cannot return to his first wife. And yet, there are some other things in this passage that are implied.

My first observation is that divorce was a reality during the days of Moses. We can easily think that divorce has only become a recent phenomenon. But, no -- divorce has been a reality for thousands of years. Divorce was a reality in the days of Jesus.

The second observation is that when a divorce happened, a "certificate of divorce" was written. This was certainly for the protection of the woman. Throughout the law, God always has a special place for those who are placed at a disadvantage: the orphan, the widow, and the alien. This certificate helped her to be distanced from her husband. He didn't have any ties to her that could still manipulate her. This certificate helped her to engage in society. This certificate helped her to remarry.

So, when the Pharisees said (in verse 4), "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away," they summarized well the implications of the teaching of the law on marriage. Divorce was a reality. Divorce required a certificate to be written up.

In Deuteronomy 24, Moses mentions only one reason for granting divorce. Listen carefully: "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, ..." (Deut. 24:1). Did you hear it? "Some indecency" is the reason given for the divorce. "Some indecency in her." This is an intentionally broad condition, because, Moses wasn't attempting to give legal grounds for divorce. Rather, he was only mentioning the reality of divorce for whatever reason it came about.

But, note well, Deuteronomy 24 isn't giving a command to divorce. Perhaps that's why the reason given for divorce sounds so broad. "He has found some indecency in her" (Deut. 24:1) -- whatever that may be.

Rabbi Hillel took this phrase as warrant for divorce. He took this phrase to mean, "for any reason." If your wife burned your food, you could

divorce your wife. If your wife talked to a strange man, you could divorce your wife. If your wife spoke too loudly, you could divorce your wife.

Rabbi Shammai, on the other hand, saw this phrase as more restrictive. Rabbi Shammai took this to mean, "immoral." If your wife was unfaithful to you, you could divorce your wife. ^[8] This seems reasonable, as adultery carried with it the death penalty, which was rarely enforced. But, if your spouse should be dead, then you are free to remarry

When it came to choosing what was correct, William Barclay said it well: "Human nature being as it is, it was the laxer view which prevailed." ^[9] And Josephus, the Jewish historian during the days of Jesus, believed this. He said, "He that desires to be divorced from his wife for any cause whatsoever (and many such causes happen among men) let him in writing give assurance that he will never use her as his wife any more." ^[10]

But, such wasn't the view of Jesus. Beginning in verse 5, Jesus gives his perspective of divorce. And in so doing, Jesus shows that He is Pro-Marriage.

Mark 10:5

But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.

Let's stop and reflect upon Jesus' words. "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment." This is the reality of all divorces. They all proceed from hard hearts. You show me a divorce, and I'll show you a hard heart. You show me a divorce, and more often than not, I'll show you two hard hearts. It's the reality of marriage. When two sinners come together to live in holy matrimony, sparks will fly. And only hearts that are filled with grace and mercy will be able to endure the storm.

And with hard hearts, repentance never comes. Forgiveness is never extended. And the hurts that are inflicted are never healed. Over my years as a pastor, I have seen plenty of marital wounds. Those that come with hard hearts are never healed. They are like open sores that get infected.

Do you remember the occasion when Jesus entered a synagogue, and there was a man with a withered hand. The religious leaders "were watching [Jesus] to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him" (Mark 3:2). Jesus was "grieved at their hardness of heart" (Mark 3:5). They had a heart that was more interested in finding fault, than in rejoicing at the good that Jesus did. Even though Jesus restored the man's hand, the Pharisees found fault that Jesus healed on the Sabbath. They missed the good! They didn't even take notice of the good that Jesus did. Instead, "The Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him" (Mark 3:6).

When hard hearts are in marriages, this happens all the time. Fault-finding is the fruit of a hard heart. I don't care how loving and kind a wife is, the hard-hearted husband will find some fault with her. I don't care how helpful a husband is toward his wife, the hard-hearted wife will find something that he didn't do for her. That's the prelude to divorce -- hard hearts.

Now, that's not to say that a hard heart is a good reason for a divorce. It's just the reality of divorce. Extending grace is the only cure. The gospel of Christ empowers us to extend grace.

Jesus says, "that's not the way that God intended it from the beginning of creation." Verses 6-8, ...

Mark 10:6-8

But *from the beginning* of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and the two shall become one flesh; so they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

Jesus twice quotes from Genesis. He quotes Genesis 1:27, "Male and female He created them." and He quotes Genesis 2:24, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." Jesus finishes with His own comment: "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

At this point, Jesus shows how He is Pro-Marriage. He wants husband and wife to remain together. He says, "Let no man separate" this union. Whenever a divorce takes place, it is tragic. Divorce is hurtful. Divorce is like ripping your flesh apart. Isn't that the implication of becoming one flesh? Imagine someone taking hold of the skin on your forearm, and then slowly pulling it back slowly. Such is the pain of divorce. No wonder it hurts so badly. Divorce is often devastating economically, as two households need to be supported on one income. Divorce is often damaging to children, as they witness two human beings who can't get along. Visitation rights are a constant painful memory. Even when children are older and out of the house, it's still painful for the children. Divorce affects your friends. Divorce affects relatives. Divorce complicates your life, especially at holidays; you have more people that you might feel obligated to visit.

I say this, not to heap guilt upon those who are divorced or to inflict more pain upon you. I say this to sympathize with you. I know your pain. I feel your pain. I say, "Run to Christ in your pain." He forgives. He heals. There is hope in Him.

Divorce has afflicted many. At Kid's KLUB the other day, we were working through the 10 commandments. We came to the 7th commandment, "You shall not commit adultery." To help the kids, I have told them that this means that you shouldn't walk away from your marriage. Rather, you should remain faithful in marriage. Every single child who came to Kid's KLUB had experienced divorce in their home. With these kids, I'm trying to do all that I can to help them stop the cycle.

So, when Jesus says, "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate," He is saying it for our good. It's far better to face some rocky times in your marriage and work them through, than it is to see the seemingly less painful path of divorce take place. Divorce is painful.

Jesus knew this. Jesus is Pro-Marriage. He wants marriages to continue. That's how God created the world.

Jesus said, "From the beginning" it has not been so. When God created the world, He created the physics so that light and gravity and mass and energy would all work together to sustain the universe. When God created the world, He created the chemistry so that gasses and liquids and solids and atoms and molecules would work together to sustain the substance in the universe. When God created the world, He ordained the biology so that water and amino acids and DNA would work together to sustain life. And when God created the world, He commanded the way that we should live, so that we might all work together. And that includes marriage.

Marriage was no after-thought. On the sixth day of creation, God ordained how marriage should be. He created one man to be joined to one woman for life. This is how our world works the best -- when men and women are joined together for life. Anything else is a result of the fall.

Consider the fact that Jesus quotes from Genesis 1 and 2. Those chapters in the Bible are foundational to establish God as our creator. They are foundational in the Bible to establish the authority in our lives.

In our society, divorce has become more and more of a reality, here in America. Over the past century, the number of divorces has steadily increased. In 1900, there was one divorce for every 13 marriages (709,000 marriages and 56,000 divorces). In 1950, there was one divorce for every 4 marriages (1,700,000 marriages and 390,000 divorces). By the turn of the century, there was one divorce for every two marriages in the United States. [\[11\]](#)

Certainly, there are many reasons for this increase, but I put before you one reason. Perhaps it is the driving reason. I do not think that it is any coincidence that as the view of evolution in our society has gained more ground, so have divorce rates increased. Marriage is grounded in God's creative work in the Garden of Eden. If you deny God's creative work, you have undermined marriage. And if you have undermined marriage, you have created a freedom to divorce at will, because there is no accountability.

But, Jesus says, "No! That is not the way that God created the world! Whenever a divorce takes place, it is because of sin!" Jesus is Pro-Marriage.

In verses 10-12, we find Jesus retiring with His disciples. And they couldn't get Jesus' words off their minds. My guess is that Jesus sounded every bit as counter-cultural as Dan Cathy, President and COO of Chick-fil-A has sounded in recent days.

Mark 10:10-12

In the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again. And He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery."

Those are some pretty strong words. This means that in every divorce and remarriage, adultery takes place. If a man divorces and remarries, he has committed adultery. If a woman divorces and remarries, she has committed adultery.

Notice here that it's the one who divorces and remarries who is guilty of adultery. It only makes sense, doesn't it?

What is adultery? It's abandoning your marriage for the sake of someone else. It's walking out and being joined to another. Often we think about adultery as taking place only while the marriage is still intact. A man goes off and has an affair with a woman. He has committed adultery.

But, Jesus says here that even if you have all of the legal papers in place, if you leave your marriage (for whatever reason), and then you meet someone else and then join to another in marriage, then you are still an adulterer. Why? Because you still walked away from your marriage.

The question that comes up here is this: "What about remarriage?" "Is remarriage always adultery?" I say, "No." It will be for at least one party in the marriage. The one who left and joined to another. It may be for both husband and wife, when both are unfaithful. But, there may be an "innocent" party -- one who was sinned against; one who was willing to reconcile. In that case, remarriage is certainly permissible by the Lord.

I believe that this is what Jesus meant in Matthew's account of this passage, "Whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery" (Matthew 19:9). When immorality exists in a marriage, it means that adultery has already taken place. And when adultery takes place, in effect, you have a spouse who has already abandoned your marriage. And when someone walks away from your marriage, Jesus permits a legal divorce (on paper) to take place.

Before we move on, let me make one more statement. Just because adultery takes place in a marriage, doesn't mean that divorce is mandatory. Adultery gives you the right to divorce. But, adultery isn't a mandate to divorce. Take the case of Hosea. Hosea's wife Gomer was a prostitute, and God told Hosea to take her as his wife even still.

Better is to reconcile. It's better for you. It's better for your children. It's better for your testimony. Reconciliation is a great picture of the gospel. Do you remember the story of Hosea? Hosea was a prophet to Israel, a country that was abandoning (i.e. committing adultery against) the LORD. In the same way, Hosea's wife, Gomer, had left him and had become a prostitute. The LORD called Hosea to pursue his wife and take her back. That's what God was willing to do with Israel (should they return).

Isn't that what Jesus Christ has done with us? He didn't call us when we were righteous. He didn't call us when we were faithful to Him. No, He called us when we were sinners. He reconciled us to Himself (2 Cor. 5:18). Our sin had created a distance between us and the Lord. But, by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, God forgives us of our sin and brings us to Himself and purifies us as the spotless bride for His Son (Ephesians 5; Revelation 19).

And that vertical reconciliation between us and God is to extend horizontally as well. "Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18-19) God has reconciled us to Himself. And now, we are called to proclaim this reconciliation to others.

A married couple who has gone through the pain of adultery, and even going as far as divorce, but has experienced forgiveness is showing forth the grace of God in their marriage. They are a picture of what saving grace is all about.

We have seen how Jesus is Pro-Marriage (verses 1-12). Now also, ...
2. Jesus is Pro-Children (verses 13-16).

In verses 13-16, we find opposition to children coming from an unexpected source. It's coming from the disciples.

Mark 10:13

And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them.

Apparently, parents were bringing their children to Jesus, because they wanted Jesus to touch them. They wanted Jesus to bless them (verse 16). And yet, the disciples didn't want to have any part of this. "The disciples rebuked them" (verse 13).

We can only imagine what they said. My guess is that it was something like, "Go away. The Master doesn't want you to come. This gathering is only for adults. He doesn't have time for the children." But, Jesus always had time for children.

Mark 10:14

But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant ...

When Jesus saw that the disciples were turning the children away, He was indignant. He was displeased. He was grieved.

These disciples should have known better. Only a short time before, Jesus has spoken of the preciousness of children.

Mark 9:36-37

Taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, "Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me."

Receiving children and embracing children and treating them appropriately is important. Now, there are times when things ought to be "adults only." And, there are times when children would be bored out of their minds in adult settings. But, when it comes to Jesus, children should be welcomed and encouraged to participate. Continuing, Jesus said, ...

Mark 10:14

... "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

"Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mark 10:14). I say this, if children want to come, let them come.

One of my aims at Rock Valley Bible Church is to create a children-friendly environment. I want the children of the church to grow up knowing that they were welcomed and appreciated and loved. I want the children of the church to know the joy of Christian community. So that, when they grow up, they will always remember the enjoyable place that church was.

Now, I'm not talking about entertainment where kids come and get awed by the show every week. I'm talking about genuine Christian fellowship and joy with the regular sorts of meetings that build our faith. I'm talking about Sunday morning when the children see their parents eager to come to worship each week, praying and singing and learning from God's word. When the children also come and listen and are involved in the service. I'm talking about potluck after church, when the children see their parents enjoying their time with others in the church. When they can eat as much as they want. I'm talking about home Bible studies, when the children see their parents delight to come. When they are welcome to sit in. I'm talking about families who are intentionally discipling their children. When the children see their parents desiring to spend time with them, teaching them God's word. Fathers passing on lessons to their sons through Man to Man. Mothers passing on lessons to their daughters through Girl Talk. I'm talking about families who worship God together in the home, when the children see their parents eager to read the Scriptures and pray with their children in the home through Family Worship.

I'm trusting that the children raised here at Rock Valley Bible Church will have fond memories of what genuine Christian community is all about. Then, as they get older and make their own choices in life, involvement in the local church will be a high priority for them. It will be not because it's their duty to go to church, but because they know the joy and help that the church can bring to their lives.

It's no accident that we provide sermon notes for the children each week -- notes that go along with the message to help engage the children. It's no accident that we bring the children up to get their children's notes before I preach. It's a visible reminder to us of the preciousness of children. It's no accident that I meet with the children after every sermon I preach. It's no accident that children are welcome at almost any activity in the church.

There are churches that frown upon children participating in the main worship service each week. They want the service to be perfect, with as few distractions as possible. Rustling children aren't part of that plan. Children are not welcome in many services. May we "permit the children to come."

I remember when a woman came to Rock Valley Bible Church, when we were meeting at Rockford Christian High School. Initially, she was distracted by the sounds of the children, as they squirm and squeek and whisper important things to their parents. As they dropped their clipboards on the hard-tiled floor. But, then, something clicked in her mind. She said, "After a few weeks, I realized that the children who were coming were engaged in the worship and they were enjoying it. And I realized that it was good for them. Now, when I hear a clipboard drop on the floor, I'm reminded of how good it is that the children are here. They are learning from God's word."

What a great perspective. May we "permit the children to come." They have much to learn, and they are learning. I'm constantly encouraged by the things that the children are learning from my messages. Just this past week, my wife was observing some children of the church at our home school coop. The teacher said something that reminded these boys of something that I had mentioned in church a few weeks before. They brought it up.

May we "permit the children to come." They have much to teach parents.

Mark 10:14

... "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

Permitting the children to come is good for them. Permitting the children to come is good for us. Children are a picture to us of how we ought to enter the kingdom of God. "The kingdom of God belongs to such as these." The kingdom of God belongs to those who are child-like in their faith.

Children are willing. Children are trusting. Children are wonderfully unconcerned about the burdens of life. Children are dependent. Children are often joyful. Children are open to instruction. Children are easily corrected when they go astray. Children don't hold grudges. Children have no money. Children have no leverage. Children aren't seeking power. Children love to learn. We have much to learn from children.

Mark 10:15

Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all."

Next week, we will see the exact opposite of a child. We will look at the rich young ruler, who was everything that a child was not! He was rich! He was powerful! He was self-dependent! He was self-righteous! He was prideful! He was knowledgeable about the commandments.

And yet, when it came down to it, he turned away from Jesus and refused to follow him. He did not receive the kingdom of God like a child. He did not enter the kingdom of God that day.

Jesus loves the little children. Jesus is Pro-Children (verses 13-16).

Mark 10:16

And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands on them.

It's like the words of the children's song, ...

Jesus loves the little children
All the children of the world
Red and yellow, black and white
They're all precious in His sight
Jesus loves the little children of the world

May we do the same.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on September 2, 2012 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chick-fil-A>

[2] <http://www.kencolemanshow.com>

[3] <http://www.bpnews.net/BPnews.asp?ID=38271>

[4] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ken-coleman/redefining-tolerance-chick-fil-a_b_1711677.html. If you are interested in reading something about tolerance, here's a great little piece: <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/02/26/contemporary-tolerance-is-intrinsically-intolerant/>.

[5] http://www.washingtonpost.com/chick-fil-a-controversy-heats-up/2012/07/27/gJQAGJXJEX_video.html

[6] <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2012/08/04/1116743/-Leave-Free-or-Die>

[7] T. W. Manson, The Servant Messiah [London: Cambridge University Press, 1953], p. 40 as quoted in Expositor's Bible Commentary, volume 8, p. 670

[8] Expositor's Bible Commentary, p. 710

[9] William Barclay, The Gospel of Mark, p. 239

[10] Antiquities 4:8:23

[11] <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0005044.html>